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Current International Policy: A Detriment to the Progression of the Honduran Economy

International policies need to change in order for Honduras to establish sufficient food security, and thus lessen the threat of chronic hunger. Problems with The United States' governmental initiatives should be addressed; policy should meet the needs of Honduras in its current condition. Leaders of comparatively wealthy countries should reevaluate the effectiveness of current foreign aid programs and reconsider whether or not they are beneficial to the region. Currently, the fate of Honduras is subject to the decisions of the world's economic super powers. The influence of the International Monetary Fund and The World Bank will determine Honduras' economic future; these organizations have the power to validate or invalidate the lives' work of millions of Hondurans. Because such power over so many individuals is concentered by financial circumstances, it is only natural that the financially insecure citizens of Honduras should want to have greater economic freedom. Self-determination is key. When Honduras attains a greater economic independence from, most significantly, the United States, the Honduran government will be better able to eliminate those factors which hinder it from alleviating hunger and promoting greater food security.

Those factors include, but are not limited to, a lack of preparedness at the onset of natural disaster, inadequate conservation techniques and inefficient use of arable land, massive unemployment, deficiencies in education availability, transportation difficulties, an inability to prevent pollution of fresh-water sources, boarder disputes with neighboring El Salvador, and a high crime rate.

According to statistics provided by the US government, the average Honduran family consists of 3 to 4 children (CIA, online). Parents are often split up to different cities by the demand for employees in different specializations. Males often leave their families as they search for economically viable options. Younger generations are most likely to move to urban centers, where a majority of the low-skilled jobs are found (Snyder). Since World War II, pressure from commercial agriculture has forced many farmers and their families to make the most of smaller plots of land. These farmers make up roughly 30 percent of Honduras' rural poor (IFAD, online). Because the land can produce only enough food to satiate the average family's immediate appetite, there is no available surplus to trade or sell. The family makes no profit from its work. In other words, the family does not contribute to the economy. These individuals are unseen, in economic terms, by the government. The government cannot assess the hardships the family faces, and as a result it cannot give aid or allocate resources to the family. Current policy does not allow for the provision of resources to those families that fall under the scope of the socio-economic radar. Because this situation is not uncommon, the government cannot account for the well being of the majority of its rural poor.

Over time, as a family struggles to secure aid, the impossibility of getting a foothold in the economic ladder increases. A slippery slope ensues. International aid programs cannot depend on the effects of the trickle down theory to ensure adequate farming capabilities. The focus of these programs, instead, should be to benefit the individuals and small time farmers who have been attempting to actively engage in their economies. This has been the focus of US Aid's policies. The Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean affords Honduras an *integrated*

assistance program. The organization's approach to responding to disasters is to: provide immediate relief to victims, develop mass employment programs, generate economic aid to keep the agricultural sector in check, provide basic education, and develop early warning systems. (Natsios, p26).

An example of such a response was in 1998, when Hurricane Mitch devastated Honduras. Agricultural avenues were demolished. Unemployment skyrocketed. 60 to 90 percent of banana crops, Honduras' main export crop, was destroyed. The global private sector teamed up with the international community to fix the damage. Additional revenue was raised to create more efficient public works systems. This project is still underway. The goal is to promote Honduras' eventual economic independence from foreign aid (US Aid, online); this would ensure that, in future instances of disaster, the Honduran government would be better able to stabilize agricultural markets and to promote reconstruction.

Soil erosion and inadequate soil conservation techniques are cause for much concern. Land is being used inefficiently; actual food production is far behind its potential. Because a family is denied arable land diet consists mostly of corn, rice, occasionally meat and fish, and beans, which is one of a very limited number of proteins available in the ever-declining conditions of the countryside ([Honduras Society](#), online).

The "Foreign Assistance Act" was a measure enacted under President John F. Kennedy to ensure that the United States holds a leadership role in examining the utilization of natural resources in developing countries (FWS, online). Again, US Aid has played a pivotal role in ensuring the basic purposes of this Act are carried out for the benefit of both the United States and those countries that the Act directly affects. Rather than taking a paternalistic role in the cultivation of better agrarian techniques, this Act provides a partnership between the US and Honduras. Both countries will work to conserve natural resources to the greatest extent possible. Such a partnership is imperative to self-determinacy, which Honduras will need to develop if it is to overcome its socio-economic troubles. (Toupal, online)

Also helping to conserve natural resources within Honduras, as well as many other Central American countries, is the Center for the Study of Institutions, Population and Environmental Change, CIPEC. Currently, this research facility is working to maintain the integrity of the forests near the mountains of western Honduras (CIPEC, online). Coffee cultivation, another important export crop, has taken precedent over preventing deforestation. As nitrogen is depleted from the soil, the land is transformed in tremendous ways. Once all nutrients are removed from the soil, and it is rendered unusable, the remaining trees are processed into timber. Because agricultural related labor is one of the highest lines of employment within Honduras, the declining quality of the land brings about unemployment.

According to a 1999 estimate, unemployment is at 12 percent. That is over twice the unemployment rate of the United States. The country is working to restore jobs to the agricultural-labor sector. However, as the land deteriorates, so does the potential for job growth. The relationship between the quality of land and job growth puts pressure on the worker. The average worker does not have the knowledge of or access to suitable conservation methods. Once Honduras is stable enough to become independent of financial assistance from the United States, self-preservation can be put in the hands of the people. Jobs will be created at the slightest disruption to the status quo.

Unfortunately, most fully employed Honduran farmers, in addition to reestablishing these damaged harvests, are further stressed by the government's emphasis on creating more export

crops (*The Clarence Foundation*, online). The International Monetary Fund and The World Bank are applying pressure to the government. Economic advisors measure that the quickest and surest route to generating revenue is through the work of the farmers. In 2004 the government reapplied to the International Monetary Fund for debt relief. The letter of intent states:

“The aim [of the proposed program] is to ensure...broadening and strengthening the commitment to fighting poverty, sharing resources more equally among social groups, escalating the struggle against corruption, [and] fortifying the financial system...The program deserves the financial support of the international community, not only because of the courageous adjustment measures it contains, but more importantly because its fundamental goal is to raise the living standards of the Honduran people.” (IMF, online)

Improving the living standards of the Honduran people must come before economic stability can be attained. Dependency on foreign aid only further escalates debt. In comprehending the “corruption” the trickle down theory perpetuates, the government is taking the necessary steps to, one day, be relinquished of its debtor-nation status. Currently, the United States government sends resources and food that never reach the target destinations. An alternative method to increasing food security would be to send people and ideas to develop infrastructure. Sharing resources among different social groups, the most difficult of the above tasks, would then be easier. Firstly, though, that would entail a righting of many inequalities.

Declining conditions are made worse when education is unattainable for 13.5 percent of population, which includes most rural poor. A proper education requires resources—resources that rural areas don’t have. The drop out rate grows each year and half a million Hondurans are illiterate (*Global Exchange*, online). Education is the tool with which Hondurans can stabilize the health of their families. Without access to such an important factor, it is little wonder that 1.5 million Honduran children suffer from the implications of malnutrition (Barlow, online). On average, a Honduran only receives 61 percent of the nutrition (measured in Kilo-calories per day) of what an American would consume (Solbrig, online). Even more grave is the status of women when compared to their counterparts. Left to look after family farms when their husbands and sons migrate to urban centers, mothers and daughters bare the brunt of economic hard times. They maintain homesteads in their financial provider’s absence, waiting for money or goods to be sent home. Families are displaced and scattered as they work to preserve their every last scrape of prosperity. The hard work of the lower classes seems irrelevant, however, when statistics show that 53 percent of the population is below the poverty line. The majority of Hondurans control a mere .6 percent of the country’s household income (CIA, online). If this radically unequal distribution of income persists, the lower class will have an even narrower opportunity to better itself. These are a few of many inequalities that disable the country from taking full-reign of its societal and economic progression.

What a family cannot grow or trade for, it must purchase. Assuming a family has the capital to purchase from suppliers, transportation difficulties stand in the way of immediate fulfillment. A majority of paved roads are in urban areas (CIA, online). Problems with commercial transportation, however, accounts for the least of the sectors issues. Public transportation malfunctions are largely due to overcrowded routes (*Honduras This Week*, online). The average working Honduran is at risk of losing a substantial amount of mobility as transportation companies seek to higher their ticket prices. This is supposed to quell the demand for tickets on a daily basis. When the prices are raised, people will still need to travel, it will just be more strenuous for the to do so. Furthermore, routes are engineered in such a way that entire sections of a community are often secluded from the rest, making goods distribution and access to community centers difficult.

Sustaining the monetary and agricultural well being from within the country can only benefit Hondurans. The example set by the village of Ojojona shows this. Transforming the land without the proper technologies leads to accelerated erosion, which is a major cause of water contamination. Water-borne intestinal disease was widespread in Ojojona before the community itself took preventative action (IRC, online). In training community members to become water managers and administrators, as well as teaching proper plumbing techniques, this community has become incredibly self-sufficient. This brand of water infrastructure has been duplicated in the Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador.

War broke out between El Salvador and Honduras in 1969. A border dispute had been festering since colonial times. El Salvadorians had been moving into the more sparsely populated Honduras for generations. This gradual population increase had little effect on the agricultural processes of the nation. Warfare, however, stressed the economy and changed production methods. Throughout the war, which lasted less than a year, food distribution lines were interrupted on both sides. The conflict was officially resolved in 1993 (Library of Congress, online), however, food security infrastructure is still on the mend. International policy should reflect Honduras' difficulties in this respect. The United Nations should be better prepared to enact harsher penalties against those tactics that prevent adequate food and nutrition from reaching civilians. It takes a great deal of time after peace accords have been reached to reestablish sound food security infrastructure (Lartigue, online).

When high-crime levels threaten the Honduran way of life, however, the goal to establish such infrastructure is arrested, at least momentarily. Elevated crime occurrences deter foreign investment (Lee, online). A lack of foreign investment allows the United States to step into a paternalistic role yet again. Honduras then loses out on the chance to prove its capacity for self-enabled growth. Because the Honduran government, as of lately, lacks the means to prevent particular crimes, foreign governments and other such entities will continue to adopt a paternalistic attitude. Crime also lends to higher transportation costs, which makes products more expensive and ultimately harms communities, particularly at the household level. An inability to control crime-induced market fluctuations, and a feeling of apathy towards ones own government lends to an overall discontentment for the Honduran family. This frustration, in addition to accentuating obvious problems with the current state of international policy, is another factor that undermines productive potential.

As more money is poured into the government, a greater percentage of it is lost in translation between and amongst rungs as it trickles down the socio-economic ladder. To begin an evolution of international policy, resources should be distributed to communities. Agricultural commodities should be allocated to individuals so that they may contribute to the betterment of economy. Existing organizations should use their influence to reach these ends and neutralize the ill effects of current international policy. According to US Aid, sufficient food security is defined as follows:

“When all people at all times have both physical and economic access to sufficient food to meet their dietary needs for a healthy and productive life.”

According to this definition, Honduras is a long way from attaining even adequate food security. As it stands, current international policy is more of a detriment to Honduras' economic and social progress than it is a benefactor. In ensuring a financial dependency, institutions and foreign governments, particularly the United States, are preventing Honduras from discovering its own strength. This potentially powerful Central American country is being disparaged of its

prospective success. Honduran families and communities should be empowered to affect change. The input of the people is at times completely disregarded, currently. International policy should be supplemental to the policies already set in place by existing government; it should not override the wants and necessities of the government, nor should it dictate the future of a people.

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